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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 GEORGETOWN 000053

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SOUTHCOS ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAD](#) [PGOV](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [GY](#)

SUBJECT: GUYANA FLOODING: Conservancy Dams near danger level

REF: GEORGETOWN 0045

1. SUMMARY. The Cabinet decided early Monday to open the Maduni sluices, which will greatly exacerbate flooding in agricultural areas on the Mahaica and Mahaicony Rivers, in order to relieve pressure on the East Demerara Water Conservancy (EDWC) which is reaching dangerous levels. While this is a proactive measure, GOG officials lack data to make informed decisions as to future flood prevention measures. Reports from Essiquibo indicate that the Tapakuma Conservancy dam has been overtopping. END SUMMARY.

2. The GoG announced Monday, January 16 that the Drainage and Irrigation Authority opened the Maduni sluices to lower the threatening water levels in the EDWC. The GOG advised residents of the agricultural areas on the Mahaica Mahaicony River, a region suffering from major flooding for the past month (reftel), to take precautions in the face of an anticipated rise in water levels. The region lies in the path of water released from the EDWC, and reluctance to flood the region contributed to the GOG's delayed response to high water levels in the EDWC during the January 2005 floods.

3. In a meeting to update the donor community on the situation, the Head of the Presidential Secretariat, Dr. Roger Luncheon, explained that rainfall to date has exceeded expectations and is anticipated to either continue or worsen in coming days. Dr. Luncheon also advised that all but a few government meetings will be canceled in the next three days as cabinet ministers fan out to the affected regions. Luncheon stressed that Georgetown and the East Coast Demerara have so far been unaffected due to interventions made as a result of last year's flooding.

4. In assessing the near-term outlook, Luncheon stated that officials will monitor the situation over the next 72 hours to determine if the rate of outflow at Maduni should increase or if an additional outlet at the Lama River will need to be opened. However, Head of the Civil Defence Commission, Colonel Chabilall Ramsarup, acknowledged after the meeting that the GOG has no rainfall gauges in the conservancy or on the conservancy watersheds, so assessing how much water is draining relative to how much has fallen is impossible.

5. Meanwhile, at a January 17 meeting of the Guyana Citizens' Initiative for Flood Relief, Major General (ret.) Joe Singh reported that the water level in the EDWC at 0800 Tuesday was 58.65 (an increase of one inch overnight), despite the opening of the Maduni sluice. Singh expected the Lama sluice to be opened imminently, as the water level on both sides of the Maduni sluice was about even, limiting its drainage potential. However, the engineer at the EDWC reported to the Consul that the water level the morning of January 17 was 58.4, down from 58.5 the day before. The engineer also reported that the Lama sluice was not open. Such conflicting reports reflect the difficulty of obtaining accurate data on the status of the EDWC.

6. While he was unable to provide a specific figure, Luncheon told donors that flooding has affected about 2000 households, including 500 families on the Mahaica River, 700 families on the Mahaicony River, and 40 on the Abrary River. Unlike the January 2005 floods which most affected the heavily populated coastline, much of this year's flooding has affected sparsely populated agricultural lands (the "backlands") a few miles inland from the coast. Many vulnerable persons have already relocated to the still dry "frontlands" of their own volition. The response to date has been through GOG and local government channels, although some NGO's have offered assistance. Luncheon and President Jagdeo have both said that GOG is not asking for international assistance, though it will accept if offered. The GoG also has not declared a disaster. Post will assess prospects for assistance should the GOG request it.

7. In addition to the briefing for the donor community, Luncheon said that President Jagdeo has already briefed Trade Unions, the Private Sector Commission, and the Leader of the Opposition on the flooding, while the Minister of Agriculture briefed a special session of Parliament on

Thursday, January 12.

18. Peace Corps exercised its communication system on Monday. All volunteers reported their sites to be dry, except one stationed at Capoeiy village who on the advice of local residents had relocated to Anna Regina on the Essequibo Coast after the nearby Tapakuma Conservancy began overtopping.

19. Embassy facilities have NOT/NOT been affected by the current round of flooding. GSO has sandbags available to place at Embassy houses should the need arise. As for health concerns, the current danger is from water-borne diseases, rather than high water levels. The GOG has been effectively using media channels to brief the public on the health dangers of floodwaters.

110. Post's Emergency Action Committee will continue to monitor the situation (septel).

11. Comment: There are two major differences with the January 2005 floods: (1) the interventions after the 2005 floods to restore the drainage and irrigation infrastructure, although leaving much to be desired, have worked so far. Georgetown and the populated East Coast have not so far experienced and serious or sustained flooding, although many buildings built on ground in violation of building codes have experienced intermittent water intrusion. (2) This year the GoG is being much more proactive sharing information and consulting concerned constituencies, including the donor community and the political opposition. This in turn provides an environment in which people are able to make better-informed decisions and a political environment in which the government and opposition can concentrate on managing the situation rather than harping at each other.

BULLEN